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NURSING IN MISSION STATIONS

NURSING IN CHINA

BY NINA D. GAGE

*Superintendent of the Yale-in-China Training School for Nurses,
Changsha, China*

Nursing in China gives one many great opportunities which are missed by the unfortunate people who have to stay at home. "Foreign mission nursing" is often spoken of as a separate branch, as institutional, private, and public health work are contrasted. Yet one may do in mission work all these various kinds of work, the only difference being that abroad, one's opportunities are limitless, while at home one is more restricted. In China, now, we are engaged in building up a nursing profession in a country which has not even a word for *nurse* in its language, let alone any conception of what the duties or advantages of a nurse or nursing service might be. Where else are the opportunities for service which for most of us can equal that?

A few special features of work abroad in contradistinction to that at home are, first, this opportunity for creative work, for interpreting nursing to an absolutely new group of people. Thus one's work is administrative and educational, precept and example, to the limit of one's strength only. In a country like China, which has always had an aristocracy of learning, one must come with the best possible foundation educationally, if one is to be respected, for the Chinese are wonderfully clever at detecting any attempt at covering up deficiencies in preparation. Without this sound foundation, too, one cannot do what will be required, as will be seen later on.

A second feature, different from work at home, is that one works with a foreign people, so one must study thoroughly their language, modes and habits of thought and life. One of the first principles of good teaching is to proceed from the known to the unknown. But to do this the teacher must know her pupils, and start from their "known," not her "known." This means hours of work, but is richly repaid in the end. It is a necessity usually neglected by medical workers, for many think they can do their work at once, and unless they are very careful, the time for this study will be crowded out, and all their future intercourse with the people will suffer. Some of the Chinese, to be sure, will speak English, but even of these when a man becomes really confidential, he tells you his heart's secrets in Chinese, not in the foreign language, and if you cannot understand him, you lose just that much chance to help him.

A third feature of work abroad is the greater need one has for ability to meet emergencies, not only of first aid, though as physicians are fewer one is left more to one's own resources, but of all sorts, from supervising building, for which I have seen nurses give up their vacation, to rescuing fugitives in the frequent wars of parties which go on by the aid of bullets, bombs, and aeroplanes, just as at home; or of meeting novel situations in the nursing school itself. Three days after I opened my school came a petition from all forty probationers requesting that they have at once their work in materia medica, symptomatology, and various diseases, as they did not care to wait three years before beginning "to practise"; requesting only six hours of ward work a day, as even that was more than they had been accustomed to do, and especially requesting no night duty, as that "tired their bodies unnecessarily." Again, a little later in the history of the school, the pupil nurses all "struck" one day, because they did not think they had been given enough time off duty. Another time they struck because a course had had to be given up owing to dearth of instructors. Another day, one of the pupils drank some bichloride of mercury because her family insisted that she leave the school, and she said that if she left the school it would be in her way, not theirs. Where at home could one meet quite this variety of experiences in a single year?

Any spare time left from the duties outlined above may be spent in translating text and reference books, those for nurses being as yet to be counted almost on the fingers of one hand. To vary this for recreation, one may spend as much time as one likes in organizing district and rural nursing, for the field is quite untouched. Proper dietetics, adapting Chinese foods to invalids, is as yet practically a virgin field, for no one has had time to do more than skirt the barest fringe.

Pioneer work has been done now, a Nurses' Association has been organized which is awaiting only the end of the world war to affiliate with the international organization; uniform examinations are held throughout the Republic; some translation has been done, and we are ready to go forward. The people in the larger centers understand something of what nursing means, and interest is growing greater. The class of applicants for admission to the nursing schools is improving everywhere. Shall we advance or retreat? Shall the anvil be struck while it is red hot, or shall it cool, and the fires of enthusiasm and understanding have to be kindled all over again? The answer lies with the nurses at home. On their shoulders is the responsibility. Those of us who are in China now are working to the limit of our strength, and we cannot complete the task alone.

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